

Spring Awakening Dramaturgy

An Honors Thesis (THEA 496)

By

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Thesis Advisor

Dr. Tyler Smith

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Abstract

Spring Awakening, a Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik musical adaption of Frank Wedekind's Expressionistic play was produced at Ball State University in the fall of 2012. The following written work will walk the reader through the process and methodology used for the dramaturgy component of the production of *Spring Awakening*. This analysis hones in on the specific goals and challenges of the project. While recounting a very specific play, process, and production, the feedback section, both from peers and professionals, offers insight into what makes up a successful dramaturgy project. This project emphasizes the role of dramaturg as a collaborating artist as well as researcher.

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I would like to thank stage manager Shannon Golden, assistant director Luke McLaughlin, music director Michael Elliot, the rest of the artistic team, the design team, and the cast of *Spring Awakening* for making the process of *Spring Awakening* so enjoyable and rewarding.

Author's Statement

Dramaturgy functions under the philosophy of lifelong learning, the belief that further analysis and thought of something illuminates greater truths. It is about being curious, asking questions. This perfectly aligns with the Honors College mindset, and so I decided my final dramaturgy project would make the perfect Honors Thesis. *Spring Awakening* represents the culmination of my time at Ball State as a dramaturg.

Spring Awakening, and the way I have been taught to approach dramaturgy, asked that I present facts based in research in a creative and engaging way that can help shape a larger production. I then had to be able to take it a step further. I had to infuse my work with the essence of the project, in this case expressionism and heightened emotion. This project employs the world-creating research for which most people in the theatrical world know dramaturgs. Beyond that, *Spring Awakening* establishes a creative approach to dramaturgy and allowed me to develop a methodology with which to approach my subsequent work.

While much of this project is grounded in fact, its many components bridge it out of research project and into creative. Additionally, the research done for the project does not argue a traditional thesis. Rather, it all ties back to the emotion of adolescence, and the relevancy the story *Spring Awakening* tells to the modern audience. This focus weaves throughout all of my work on *Spring Awakening*: actor packets, educational materials, program note, lobby display, and philanthropic outreach.

I believe that *Spring Awakening* is a story that needs to be told, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of Ball State's telling. This project explores the ability of dramaturgy to heighten and continue the dialogue opened by a piece of theatre.

SPRING AWAKENING DRAMATURGY: AN HONORS THESIS, 2013

Breadth and Scope

When constructing a plan on how to approach *Spring Awakening* dramaturgically, the show presented a specific number of challenges that had to be addressed from the onset. *Spring Awakening*, while extremely popular in the theatre world, explores much material considered inappropriate in a conservative, Midwestern community. Additionally, *Spring Awakening* served as Ball State's Freshman Connections show. The Freshman Connections program at Ball State University helps freshmen transition into collegiate life. Freshmen are placed in discussion groups that often attend events together. These events aim to expand the worldview of freshmen, presenting them with exposure to new ideas and ways of life. All freshmen at Ball State (the 2011-2012 school year welcomed 3, 844 first time freshmen) were offered a free ticket to *Spring Awakening*, and many were required to see it for the Freshman Connections discussion groups. This provided a lot of opportunities dramaturgically, but it also meant that there was a significant portion of the audience that might have minimal experience with theatre, or not like musicals. Additionally, *Spring Awakening* presented stylistic choices, such as pulling out handheld microphones in a historical world, that might throw even audience members familiar with the conventions of musicals. With all of this in mind, my plan of attack for *Spring Awakening* can be considered in five distinct groups: cast, lobby display, talkback, educational website, and philanthropic outreach. In all aspects the main focus was to bridge the familiar teen angst narrative that *Spring Awakening* presents with the more obscure ideas of expressionism and the historical world in which *Spring Awakening* lives.

With the cast, I aimed to provide a standard dramaturgical book in the sense that it would provide information about the historical facts of the world. Many cast members were already intimately familiar with the show, but I needed to provide contextualization for the world. I also then needed to articulate the intense emotional reaction most had to the play. I wanted to provide what the cast was used to from a dramaturgical experience, and also provide more creative entrances to the world for the actors.

I knew the lobby display had to be more interesting and engaging than straight facts and figures about the world of the show. It needed to represent the emotional and expressionistic ties of *Spring Awakening*. Additionally, with the knowledge a large portion of the audience would be comprised of Freshmen Connections and Theatre 100, the introductory theatre course open to all students on campus to fulfill a fine arts requirement, I knew that the lobby display needed to grab their attention. I also knew that I wanted the audience to be able to walk away from the lobby display with something more emotionally tangible. I wanted to be able to offer a sense of hope with the show to emphasize the point of "Purple Summer." The entire display needed to tie in conceptually with the show and the rest of my dramaturgical work.

Knowing from the beginning of the process that this was the Freshman Connections show, the opportunity for a talkback became extremely important to me. *Spring Awakening* displays what happens when adults do not actively engage in a dialogue with their teenagers, dooming their children by refusing to bend. I did not want our production to make a similar mistake. The show provided a unique opportunity to open a larger conversation. In the past, getting people to attend talkbacks has been a challenge. However, I felt the opportunity too important to pass up. Knowing the Freshman Connections audience was coming, and that they were even closer to the relevancy of this piece than those of us working on the show, who felt the

necessity of the production very acutely, meant I knew I needed to reach out to them in some way.

I then wanted to expand this audience outreach even further by creating an educational website. This would provide the opportunity to further establish the world and extend the visual aesthetic of the show. It aimed to help the Freshman Connections and Theatre 100 audiences understand the show more, both the world of the play and the act of creating a piece of theatre. The Theatre 100 class was assigned a paper on *Spring Awakening*, and it was possible that individual Freshman Connections groups were also assigned papers; most groups would likely have discussions about the show. The conception of this educational packet presented new challenges. The content would have to not only be distilled, but I would have to take reading level into consideration. I could not operate under the assumption that my audience knew how theatre was created, nor could I assume those reading would be intimately familiar with the show.

The final piece of my dramaturgical endeavors manifested in a philanthropic tie-in. In the past, Alpha Psi Omega has utilized shows to raise funds for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. I became interested in the idea of supporting a philanthropy, especially one that would impact a more immediate community. I also was intrigued with helping an organization that could be tied directly back to the show. A friend of mine became extremely interested in supporting the Indiana Youth Group, an organization that also fit within the idea of *Spring Awakening*. Thus the Indiana Youth Group became the group I aimed to benefit with donations from the beginning.

All challenges were closely considered throughout the execution of the dramaturgy for *Spring Awakening*. Choices were made carefully and deliberately in order to allow the audience

the best experience with the show possible. All of my goals for specific audiences to reach, were accomplished while also maintaining a unity, and supporting the overall concept of the show.

Process:

My adventure with *Spring Awakening*, a show slated for the Fall 2012 season, began at the end of the Spring 2012 semester. After receiving my assignment, I read Wedekind's original play, along with the musical. Contemplating the pieces thematically, I worked through how their ideas could be conceptualized from a dramaturgical perspective. I kept returning to the idea of adolescence being a paradoxically real and unreal experience. Thus, the roots of Expressionism spread in Wedekind's original became extremely important to my conception of the piece. I prepared a few basic notes for my director, Jennifer Blackmer, on Expressionism, the play, and where my head was at with the two at the time. Luckily, Jen arrived on the same page through her own work as well. Expressionism guided the conception of the play. The process dramaturgically then became about exploring Expressionism to its fullest, but also about being able to explain Expressionism and the historical world of *Spring Awakening* from within the more comfortable framework of an adolescent, teen angst story.

Cast:

Over the summer, I created the dramaturgical website for the cast, established at <http://www.springawakeningbsu.weebly.com>. Before leaving Ball State in the spring, I developed a table of contents on which to focus my efforts. I aimed to find as many first-hand accounts from teens living in the late 19th century as I could to supplement the topics covered, hoping to provide authentic voices to issues. Combined with how these issues are explored today, this technique helped bridge the historical world with the contemporary teen experience. The German History in Documents and Images, which featured primary sources including political cartoons, photographs, and first hand accounts, proved an indispensable resource. As Jen

focused what she was interested in more, Expressionistic artist Egon Schiele became more present. His jarring and controversial images mirrored her vision of *Spring Awakening*. His work displays youth and the discovery of sexuality in a gritty, at times disturbing, way. More Schiele images were provided to the cast on the website to reflect this vision.

Writing the book, I began to focus on tone as a way to bridge the conceptual barriers as well. This website, parallel to a standard dramaturgical book, is the most straightforward to the typical dramaturgical process I have engaged in at Ball State over the last three years. It provides facts about the world of the show, and information on how these facts influence the world. However, I honed in on tone, attempting to create an emotional connection for the actors to help them transition back into the adolescent mindset. The book asks cast members to recall their own emotions about things like adolescence and sexuality, as well as explains the relevance such issues pose in today's world. The introduction borders on a stream of conscious rehash of the teenage mind space, inviting the actors into the dramaturgical world in much the same way the audience is invited into the world of *Spring Awakening* through song.

To further this emotional connection, the cast was asked to create an Expressionistic portrait for their character. Many cast members said this exercise helped them understand Expressionism, their character, and how their character fit into the larger world. So, the assignment opened up the internal emotional world, but it also allowed the actors to explore the larger world that influenced that emotion. One actor said about the task, "It forced me to closely examine German Expressionism and thus better understand the feel we were going for. I had to make it personal which then carried over into my creation of the world."

My work with the cast continued into rehearsals as dramaturgical issues were raised. Attending most every rehearsal, I did things such as scan the Steven Sater's published

explanation of the musical's lyrics, *Purple Summer*, and send it to the cast. As this text revealed the lyrics of *Spring Awakening* were rich with allusions, I added references made in *Purple Summer* to the glossary of the cast website. Latin pronunciation information expanded as we ran "All That's Known." When prop microphones appeared in rehearsal I added a visual of how a cardioid microphone picks up sound for the cast to reference. A cast member requested and was sent a free side-by-side English and Latin copy of *the Aeneid*. When the cast member who played Martha, a girl struggling with physical and sexual abuse, asked for more information on how sexual abuse effects a person emotionally and psychologically, we shared facebook messages talking through it all. I also provided her with a list of books that could provide more information and a message board where survivors shared their personal experiences.

Lobby:

I also took the desire to be emotionally, as well as intellectually, engaging into my approach to the lobby displays. My educational display showcased two fictional journal entries focused around the topics of adolescence, sexuality, education, suicide, abuse, and abortion. The facts of these topics were embedded in these journal entries. However, the focus became the impact of these topics on an emotional level, because that is what *Spring Awakening* explores. This approach perfectly merged my overall goal. The journal entries provide a fairly standard teen narrative, but they also integrate the facts of the world. For instance, the suicide board was crafted off the substantial research that discussed the epidemic of school suicide in late 19th century Germany. As this was the major cause of suicide, as well as Mortiz' reason for committing suicide within *Spring Awakening*, the circumstances of the historical journal entry reflected this research. I took the facts, make sure they were communicated within the piece, and then extrapolated out to make a wider statement. I also had to pay attention to tone and writing

within the journal entries. The nineteenth century entries could not appear too contemporary. I had to remain diligent in making sure not all the voices sounded the same. Each entry was conceived as separate from all the others in terms of circumstances; they were all supposed to be different people and different voices. A board that explained the concept of the display was also included to avoid people confusing the entries as real. This proved a delicate balance. It was necessary to explain the conceit of the project, without diminishing the emotional reaction. I also had to be careful when approaching the topics, treating them honestly and respectfully, and shying away from clichés or assumptions. The aim was to further reflect the emotional immediacy of the issues, not to trivialize them. I believe I was successful as I had multiple people inform me that certain boards brought them close to tears.

As *Spring Awakening* does, the educational display juxtaposed the ideas of the historical and contemporary world. Depending on when an audience member viewed the display, this introduced or continued their exposure to the harsh contrast between the two eras, furthering the convention and making it more understandable. However, the display also furthered the idea that the periods are similar in many more ways than we often acknowledge. In addition to the journal entries, the display featured imagery representing the issue explored on each board, images to represent both 19th century Germany and contemporary America. Quotes and/or newspaper headlines further flushed out the world. While I worked hard to make the journal entries as concise and distinctive as possible, there are many audience members who are not drawn to text on a lobby display. All of the images and quotes complemented the content of the journals, and if someone looked at those pieces without reading the entries, they still walked away with more information on the world of the play. The educational display encapsulated the gritty juxtaposition of 1890s Germany and contemporary America. The visuals were just as jarring and

shocking as the content explored in the show. The display furthered the visual aesthetic of the show.

Also bringing the aesthetic of the show to the lobby was an experiential display that featured leftover wood used to slat the stage floor. This display became the centerpiece forwarding my goal to allow the audience to leave the show with something more spiritually. This display was a place where audience members could complete the phrase “I Believe” with their own “stories, trials, and hopes to inspire others,” and then put their answers into a submissions box. The show, and our emphasis on the Expressionism inherent to the piece, heavily focuses on the emotion behind the action. “Purple Summer” ends the show hopefully, after immense tragedy. I wanted to reflect this offering of hope, the idea that something good can come of the bad. *Spring Awakening* serves as a reminder that one is not alone during adolescence, a time when one often feels the most alone. The “I Believe” wall gave people the chance to offer this hope to others. Opening night the wall featured approximately 20 sheets completed by cast and crew members, demonstrating to the audience the purpose of the wall. I went through the box every night or following morning to make sure all submissions were appropriate and then stapled them to the wall. By the end of the run, the wall featured 97 offerings of hope, inspiration, or simply a smile.

These “I Believe” statements were also posted to tumblr at <http://www.springawakeningbsu.tumblr.com>. I maintained this blog throughout the duration of the show, adding every “I Believe” posted to the wall as either a photograph or a quote. Tumblr provided the opportunity for the project to grow bigger than just the Ball State campus. The statements are all encouraging and inspiring, if not funny, and I wanted these words to be able to breathe in the larger world, to have the opportunity to touch the lives of people in far off places.

It also allowed members of the Ball State community to see what was being posted even after they saw the show. The blog garnered approximately 30 followers. It also received reblogs and likes, people sharing select content with followers of their own blogs. Many of those sharing posts were not necessarily Ball State students. The approximately 325 likes and reblogs of “I Believe” statements made via the tumblr shows that this project resonated. The Ball State Box Office also shared “I Believe” statements through twitter. The account tweeted some of the anonymous statements written by the cast in the days leading up to opening as an alternative way of advertising, drumming up excitement and curiosity. Thus, this more spiritual take-away had a reach even further than the physical lobby.

The Expressionistic portraits completed by the cast for first rehearsal were also featured in the lobby. This helped further introduce the audience to the idea of Expressionism. The portraits helped set the emotional stage for the show, and demonstrated the worldview of these characters. It allowed the actors to tell the story of their character in a different medium.

As I transitioned into an audience outreach mindset, the program note began to form. The director, Jennifer Blackmer, sent me an early version of her program note, asking for my opinion on cutting it. From this, I adopted the history of the show for my own note. I then had to turn this history into a narrative that also touched on why the play is relevant today, all within 200 words. I connected the popularity of the show to the teen angst narrative that is familiar in contemporary culture. After all, Wedekind’s *Spring Awakening* was part of the first generation of true adolescent fiction. I tied this to today’s popular young adult literature, such as *the Catcher in the Rye* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The narratives of these popular contemporary stories mirror the pain and tragedy that shows up in *Spring Awakening*. These are not happy stories. This parallel demonstrates a societal need for teenagers to know others are experiencing similar

trials and tribulations. *Spring Awakening* provides a similar experience as such young adult literature, and makes it much more communal and immediate.

Talkback:

My last large audience outreach endeavor was leading the Freshman Connections talkback after the second Thursday of the run. The talkback was sponsored by the Freshmen Connections program, but the entire campus was made aware of the event through an e-mail notification. The box office also tweeted information about the talkback. Thus, the audience that stayed, upwards of 50 people from my approximate count, were of a wider sample than just Freshmen. Many adults, including some professors I recognized from the Honors department, stayed. I had a series of questions prepared if the conversation stalled, but these were not needed. Additionally, the talk hit all of the points I wanted to address. The discussion touched on the relevancy of the piece, how it resonated with the cast, and what we were hoping would be achieved with the production. *Spring Awakening* shocks audiences, the blatant display of teenage sexuality and language being one of the main offenses. All of this was addressed. Audience members asked whether the show was produced simply for the shock value or to make a larger statement, and if so, what that statement was. The older audience members also expressed interest in the transition from Wedekind's text to the musical, allowing me opportunities to provide information as well as facilitate discussion. Throughout, the cast answered the inquiries brilliantly, offering insight into our process and engaging personal anecdotes.

One cast member summed it up perfectly. He began to talk about the audience the night before the talkback, an audience composed of many people willing to talk and text through the show. They laughed during the beating scene. There were giggles as Wendla was dragged off for an abortion. Naturally, the energy affected the cast. Then, during "Purple Summer," where in our

production the cast was in the house, this specific cast member spotted one girl sitting between her boyfriend and another friend actively weeping and attempting to hide it from her companions. He said that moment made the whole night worth it. The payoff of touching even one person was what *Spring Awakening* was all about. The talkback gave the opportunity for the articulation of this. We were able to delve into how working on this show personally affected the cast, what they were walking away from the show with, and what they hoped others would take away.

Educational Site:

My efforts to reach the Freshman Connections and Theatre 100 audience continued with an educational website. I aimed to make this website visually strong to attract the eyeballs of audiences made up of students who may be initially hesitant when it comes to reading more material. I utilized the Schiele imagery to give the book a cohesive look, as well as visually communicate the world of the show. I also had to distill all information down to the most immediately pertinent and engaging, while making the language even more snappy and simple. This was all accomplished while preventing spoilers. The educational book had to create the world in much less time than I had in the cast book, where the world can be flushed out more extensively. Finally, I released the website at

<http://www.springawakeningbsueducational.weebly.com> to both the large Theatre 100 lecture class and the Freshmen Connections program. Information on how to access the website also appeared in my program note and educational lobby display once the show opened.

Philanthropic Outreach:

My audience outreach and lobby work culminated in a philanthropy. The choice to utilize the opportunity the show presented to raise money for the Indiana Youth Group stemmed from

the aim to provide a hopeful takeaway from the show. The choice to raise funds for the Indiana Youth Group was an attempt to actively pursue the promise of *Spring Awakening* by providing a “Purple Summer” for teens in our near community. Indiana Youth Group helps LGBTQ youth in the Indianapolis area, but they do not turn away help to any area youth. The organization not only helps adolescents with many of the problems addressed in *Spring Awakening*, it provides educational opportunities for families and community members. This combats the main issue raised within *Spring Awakening* of the communication breakdown between generations. I made contact with Indiana Youth Group, receiving a package of brochures to give audience members more information on the group. I organized a small group of Alpha Psi Omega (APO), the theatre fraternity on campus, members to help collect donations. Even what the money was collected in aesthetically complemented the show. We used a basket leftover from props and a glass jar. The volunteers situated themselves outside the entrance to the house every night, and I would be there to supervise and make sure the money was put in the box office. I counted the money daily, keeping a running total of donations. We ultimately raised just under \$400 dollars for the Indiana Youth Group. The actual donation will be made through our Alpha Psi Omega chapter.

Overall, my dramaturgical work provided a vision to bolster the show. The dramaturgy featured an aesthetic unity that was specifically chosen to complement the overall concept and vision of *Spring Awakening*. My work illuminated the traditional teen narrative in light of Expressionism and the world of the play. It helped establish the world. It explained the emotion, and how that emotion is mainly the same today, and it offered hope that although society makes

many of the same mistakes today that they did in the world of *Spring Awakening*, that there is a “Purple Summer”.

Peer Feedback

After the final performance of *Spring Awakening* I sent out surveys via google forms to the following categories: the *Spring Awakening* cast, Freshman Connections groups, Theatre 100 students, Theatre Freshmen, and theatre students at large. I aimed to determine the way dramaturgy is utilized at Ball State University, and the efficacy of specific parts of my project. Unfortunately, the numbers received back on the surveys, while not completely dismal, did not provide a sample size large enough that I felt comfortable drawing conclusions. I will however include some highlights from written responses garnered from the surveys.

Cast

How helpful did you find the Expressionistic Portrait exercise? If you found it helpful, how did it help you get into the world of the play?

“It forced me to closely examine German Expressionism and thus better understand the feel we were going for. I had to make it personal which then carried over into my creation of the world.”

Where there any specific instances you can recall where the dramaturgical information helped create the world for you or inform one of your choices?

“A specific instance? No. But once you receive information you have integrated it into your personal database of knowledge. So all the dramaturgical information had some influence on my choices.”

Did you find it beneficial having the dramaturg available at rehearsals every night?

“Yes! Even if we don't ask questions consistently, it's inspires confidence knowing your dramaturg is there to clarify things and that you always have a resource if something comes up.”

Any further comments on the dramaturgical materials you'd like to share?

“I can only hope the rest of the dramaturgs I work with through out my career are half as good as Melody.”

Theatre 100

No further comments provided.

Freshman Connections

Any further comments on the dramaturgical materials of Spring Awakening and how they influenced your experience you'd like to share?

“The acting was great! I went specifically for entertainment and although it was not what I expected I thought it was very well done.”

“I loved the play very much. I would not have come to see it had I not been required to for my english assignment. Moritz was my favorite character and I really connected with him.”

Theatre Freshmen

Any further comments on the dramaturgical materials of Spring Awakening and how they influenced your experience you'd like to share?

“I was impressed by the obvious time spent by the dramaturgical team - the "I Believe" wall and the expressionistic portraits were a really interesting way to get the cast involved and interacting with the audience before the show had even begun. It was also a really strong choice to display imaginary journal entries of young people pertaining to the show's issues, showing how universal the themes and content are. The most influential item for me, though, was the note from Jen Blackmer. Reading her interpretation of the show's intent and how she felt about the show's content really helped me interpret how and why she made certain choices in the production.”

“It was nice to have an insight into the world of the musical. It helped me understand how people lived and made it more believable that these children could've or did go through similar problems.”

“I really liked that we were able to have the dramaturgist come into class with some of the cast members for the Aesthetics Talk Back. I feel like because of her research, she was able to answer some questions that even the cast members wouldn't have been able to answer.”

“The dramaturgical materials made me discover that the issues in today's society have been in existence for over 120 years. It made me think, holy crap, are we ever gonna fix this junk?”

“Personally, I went into the production knowing the context of the play, but the information provided gave me the point of view this specific production of *Spring Awakening* was taking. I found it highly interesting to peruse the displays at intermission, and the idea of the cast members doing a self-portrait as their characters was intriguing. It was interesting to try and match each character to their self-portrait.”

“I liked the dramaturge's roll because I personally like when things are period correct in productions. When something is out of the era it immediately takes me out of the scene.”

Theatre Students

Any further comments on the dramaturgical materials of Spring Awakening and how they influenced your experience you'd like to share?

“Your hard work on the show really showed and really paid off. Best lobby display since I've been here.

Since I knew the show really well, I saw the materials as interesting extra information. I wonder how it would have been different if I was completely new to the show. I'm pretty sure though that it would have informed me a great deal.”

“The dramaturgical material was directly reflected in the production itself and vice-versa. I feel like dramaturgical material was unneeded but that it helped to fill in the cracks in the play and to make the production more accessible to modern audiences who might not understand the conventions or thought behind the show.”

“The I Believe Wall was a great way to bring the message of the theme across to the audience of today.”

Professional Feedback

Kennedy Center American Collegiate Theatre Festival, Region III: Saginaw, Michigan- January 8-12 2013

The feedback I received at the regional Kennedy Center American Collegiate Theatre Festival (KCACTF) was extremely positive. After the dramaturgs presented their projects to a panel of three professional respondents: Theresa, head of the KCACTF region one dramaturgy; Alexis, a freelance dramaturg based out of Chicago; and Rachel, a freelance dramaturg based out of New York City.

My biggest critique involved the presentation of my project at the festival. Although I had an outline of what I wanted to say written out and rehearsed, nerves flustered me at certain points. The biggest note in regards to my actual presentation involved simply relaxing my voice. I think this can easily be accomplished by working on how to control my breathing more effectively in such situations. Another good speaking note I gleaned from the response, although not given to me, involved consciously speaking in active voice when giving a presentation, and I

aim to be more cognizant of tense in my own presentations as a result. The presentation was by no means awful, and I grew leaps and bounds from my presentation the previous year. I simply need to learn to control subconscious nerves in order to give a presentation that matches the confidence of my work.

Theresa asked me to consider the amount of text included in my lobby display, whether it was possible to edit it down. This was an area to which I gave considerable thought while creating my lobby display. It was necessary for me to communicate a story, emotion, all rooted in fact, for two time periods per subject. I limited myself to 200-words per “journal” entry but could not parse it down beyond that. It was however a note I had considered, and made a very deliberate choice about.

Alexis’ main comment involved reflecting on my methodology for Spring Awakening. “What are you going to do when you get a play you hate,” she asked me almost right away. She wants me to consider what works in order to apply it to other projects. Luckily, this analysis does just that. I have a wonderful record of my methodology and reasoning to return to for other projects.

Ultimately, the time I spent at the regional KCACTF festival vindicated the dramaturgical approach of our department. They emphasized creative approaches to dramaturgy, and they liked the creative approach I used. Rachel specifically enjoyed the philanthropic tie to Indiana Youth Group, emphasizing it is important that a philanthropy connect to the greater theme of the show. The regional festival gave me some very specific points to think about, but overwhelming confirmed that I am approaching my work with the correct mindset.

**Kennedy Center American Collegiate Theatre Festival, National Festival:
Washington, D.C.- April 16-20 2013**

During a Friday session, Arena Stage dramaturg Jocelyn Clarke articulated the idea that as a dramaturg one should ask a lot of questions, but that it is not always about finding an answer. Every day our morning conversations with freelance dramaturg Heather Helinsky started out with a statement and a question about the production we had seen the previous evening. The past week at the Kennedy Center American Collegiate Theatre Festival, and the conversations with professionals this conference facilitated, has illustrated that dramaturgy lives within a balance of these questions and statements.

Dramaturgy is asking questions about the work. Our conversations about this focused heavily on the new play experience. After all, if new play dramaturgy is a lot about working with the playwright to dig deeper into the piece, questions are key. It helps them think about their work in a new ways. However, we also discussed the model of questioning in terms of “giving notes.” The general consensus seemed to be that as much as possible notes should be conversations. Questions help shape these conversations.

Dramaturgy is asking questions about the process, specifically which process will serve a piece best. The same approach will not be the most effective for every process. Wilma Theatre dramaturg Walter Bilderback presented a model in which a standard dramaturgical packet of information handed to the actors is not used. We explored the utilization of traditional versus new media. With Studio Theatre dramaturg Adrien-Alice Hensel we talked about pulling back significantly on the process as per a director’s needs, and that being okay. These differing models at first seem overwhelming, and then become liberating. If the method is fluid, we as dramaturgs are not locked into a specific methodology, and this in turn becomes part of how we operate as artists. It can take creative thinking to go with the flow.

Dramaturgy is asking questions about the theatre. Conversations this week often led back to the death of the subscription audience. We briefly brushed on how theatres are trying to combat this. As a dramaturg, as a theatre artist, it is impossible not to have opinion on the state of the theatre, and a vision of where it is possible for the theatre to go next. It is important to know the landscape, and even to have a vision of what could be. A person should know what theatrical aesthetic is most appealing to them personally. Ideas shared by director Moisés Kaufman at his Friday talkback illuminated this best. Wednesday we met with dramaturgs from three theatres that had wildly different institutional missions. As a dramaturg, it becomes necessary to navigate these different approaches to theatre. This exposure gave a wonderful idea of the variety that exists.

Dramaturgy is about asking questions about oneself. It is important to know how one fits into the process of any given piece of work, or how one fits into one specific institution. However, this week has shown me it is also important to really accept the outlooks and methodologies that work for one as an artist. This does not mean ignoring new outlooks and approaches, or accepting a textbook way of approaching the craft. It means crafting a shareable definition of dramaturgy that reflects your philosophy, and putting this into practice.

CenterStage dramaturg Gavin Witt urged us to remain in the “creative state of ‘I don’t know’” for as long as possible, but at a certain point, decisions do have to be made. Dramaturgy is about posing questions, thinking critically. It is also about being comfortable in your answers. It is about giving oneself permission to have an opinion, to claim expertise, to become an artist. This week we discussed being confident in our own authority. While this does not mean pretending to know everything, it does mean standing tall with what you do know, and exuding confidence so others will utilize your skills.

This week has confirmed the way I approach dramaturgy in many ways. I have been introduced to a wide variety to approaches to the craft. The week has provided a wonderful sense of community for a field, which, at the undergraduate level, is often hard to connect to people of the same mindset. In a very visceral way the week has helped me begin the intellectual shift away from the way I do dramaturgy at my college to what I want and need to be doing within the larger theatrical world. I may still have a lot of questions, but that is okay. I am just starting out, and this week has helped point me toward some very intriguing answers.

Supplemental materials are located on a flashdrive in the back pocket of this binder.

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